Educating for a change

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Educating Strategically

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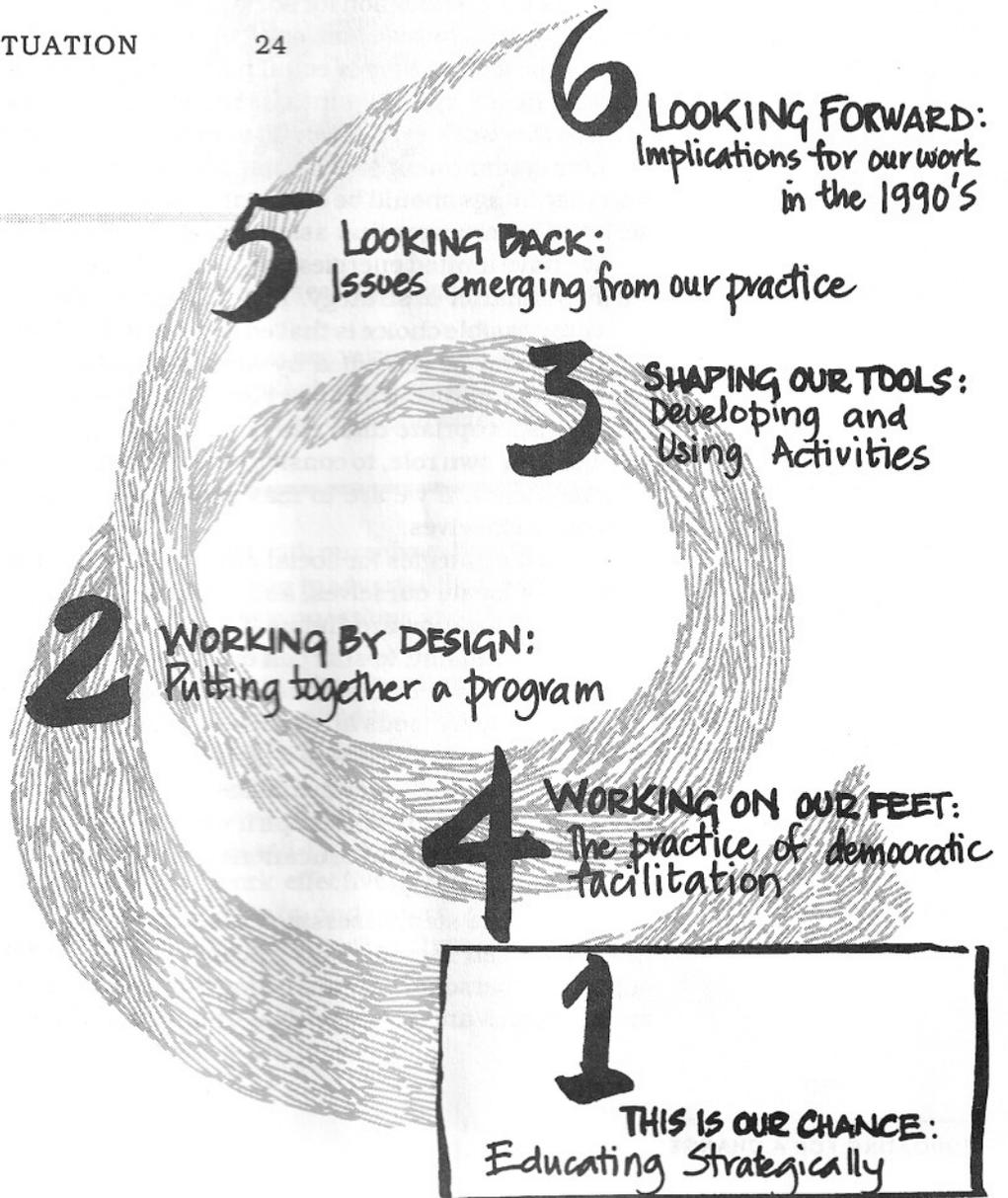
This book is about the practice of education, and that practice includes, first of all, strategic preparation.

Whatever the context or the occasion, we want our work to make a difference. Whether we're chairing a meeting, planning organizational change, facilitating a workshop, creating a cultural production, or leading a mass rally, we aim to change power relations in the society, in however small a way.

That's because, for us, the status quo isn't neutral. Under the skin of our society there is pain. Increasingly, groups of Canadians are organizing around issues, both local (like the location of waste dumps) and international (like the negotiations for a free trade agreement among Canada, the United States, and Mexico). In these and other efforts to organize we are all nurturing a vision of a more just, humane society, in which creativity is encouraged and differences are respected.

At its best, education for social change gives us a taste today of what we seek in the future. The sessions can be varied and focused, humorous and serious. Our recipe for learning is equal portions of compassion, backbone, and curiosity. This heady mix sustains us through times of discouragement and draws us back to this work even when its effects seem diffused and slow.

Our commitment to education for social change, then, grows from a conviction that things should be different, a commitment to make them different, and a series of experiences that assure us that they can be different.

We have limited energies and skills and choosing the time and place to apply them is a matter of strategy. This chapter focuses on how to choose.

One possible choice is that education isn't what is needed. Let's face it, not all social ills can be remedied by workshops. As activist educators, we may conclude that organizing for direct action, or pausing for in-depth research, would be more appropriate than educational initiative. We must be prepared to problematize our own role, to consider the possibility of our own irrelevance at particular moments, if we are to make the most of the opportunities that really do present themselves.

For us, strategies for social change education rely on two initial steps. First we need to locate ourselves, and those with whom we work. Second we need to assess the situation around us. Only then can we start to push the limits of our social environment, to sharpen our tactical skills.

Many social activists prefer to skip the stage of locating themselves, so they can more quickly focus attention exclusively on the needs of a specific struggle. We believe that the needs of a struggle can only be met by people who are self-aware, sensitive to power dynamics, and engaged consciously with people different from themselves. In this spirit we direct our attention to social identity, organizational identity, and educational identity. We call this process "building critical self-knowledge".

The second step, assessing the situation, means considering how our identities have been moulded historically, rather than treating those identities as static and "personal". By analysing the context of our work, weighing up the balance of forces and the historical timing, our actions can have maximum effect.

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Part of this, as we'll see, involves using the methodology of "Naming the Moment".

While researchers, organizers, and other allies can enrich our thinking, as educators we shouldn't absolve ourselves of social analysis. Strategic thought is too central to our work to be "contracted out". We have to do it for ourselves.

PAINTING
OURSELVES
INTO THE
PICTURE

We also need to start with ourselves. By this we mean that educators lacking critical self-knowledge can inadvertently erase themselves from the picture, by not working through basic questions about who they are and why they do what they do.

Usually it's during a break, when we are chairing a meeting or facilitating a course, that a participant poses the question directly. "Who are you, anyway?" The seriousness and honesty of our response depend on whether we've done our homework, whether we have reflected critically on our personal limits and potentials and on our social role.

Without critical self-knowledge, educators / activists can't face the challenge of social justice work effectively. If they don't clarify the different identities of educators, participants, and others, they will find that tensions arise unexpectedly and create problems rather than serve as a source of richness and creative energy.

If we can't put ourselves into the picture, we can't help others do the same. When the educator's personal identity and stake are made invisible, a learner can't quite pin down who is talking and what the person's connection is to the issue being discussed.

Most establishment education attempts to erase the educator – there is no subject to the verb. That's fine for the traditional power relations, where teachers dominate learners. As social change educators, refusing to erase ourselves isn't a matter of self-publicizing. It equips us to answer the legitimate questions from learners about who we are in relation to them and their issues.

Then the power dynamics in the group can be linked more consciously to the wider power relations in which our work is situated. We can make transparent the process of empowerment so that the learners can have informed and collective control over it.

The tool we use for locating the educator is an "identity triangle", made up of social identity, organizational identity, and political identity. Let's consider each dimension in turn.

The Identity Triangle

① Social

Educator's
Identity

② Organizational

Political ③
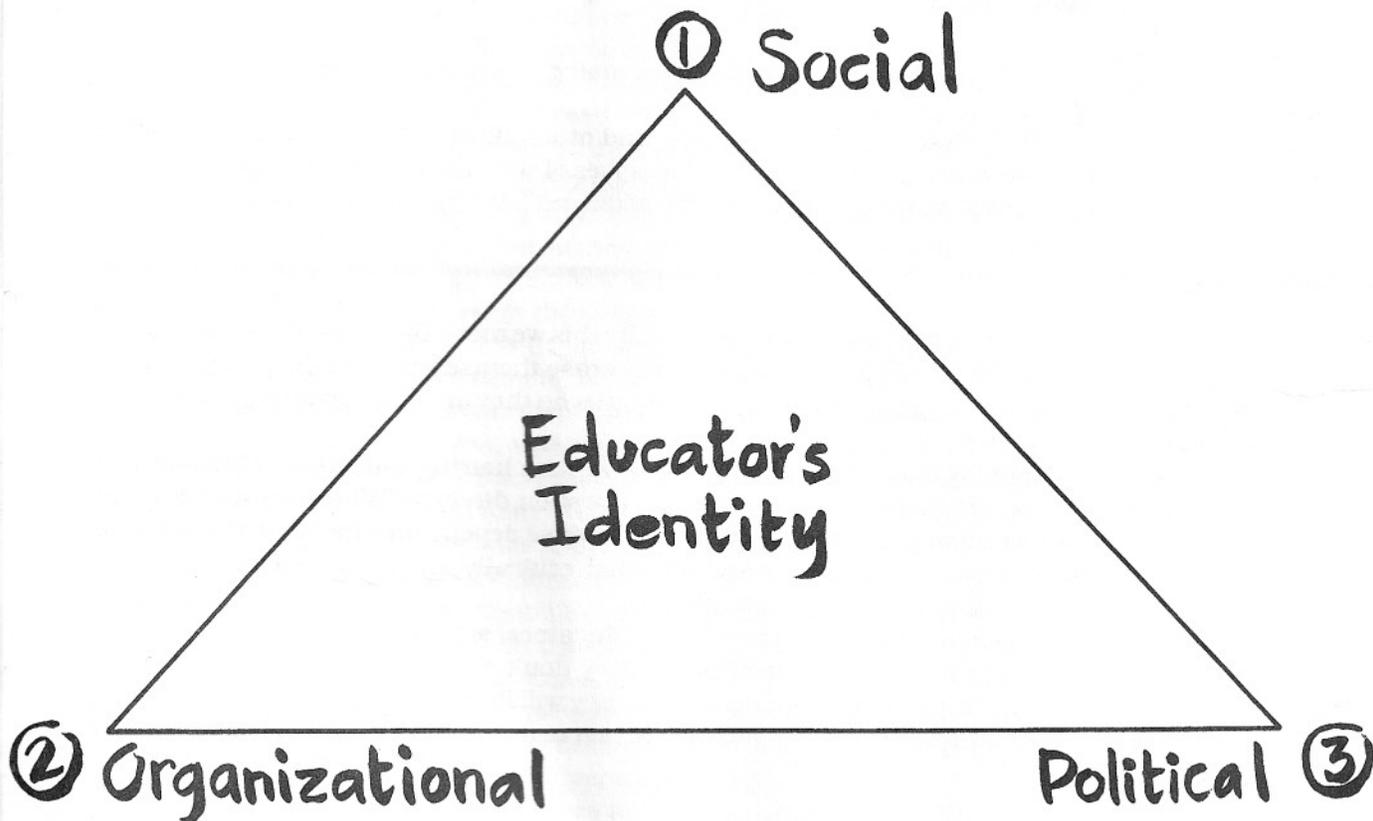
Social identity

In our work we often use a graphic called the "power flower". It's a tool we use for looking at who we are in relation to those who wield power in society. We use the outer circle of petals (which a group usually fills in together) to describe the dominant social identity. The inner petals (which workshop participants fill by themselves or in pairs) describe the social identity of the individual.

The power flower is a versatile tool, and we will return to it again in other chapters of this book. For the moment, however, we want to use it to link the social identity of the educator and the people he or she works with.*

The Power Flower
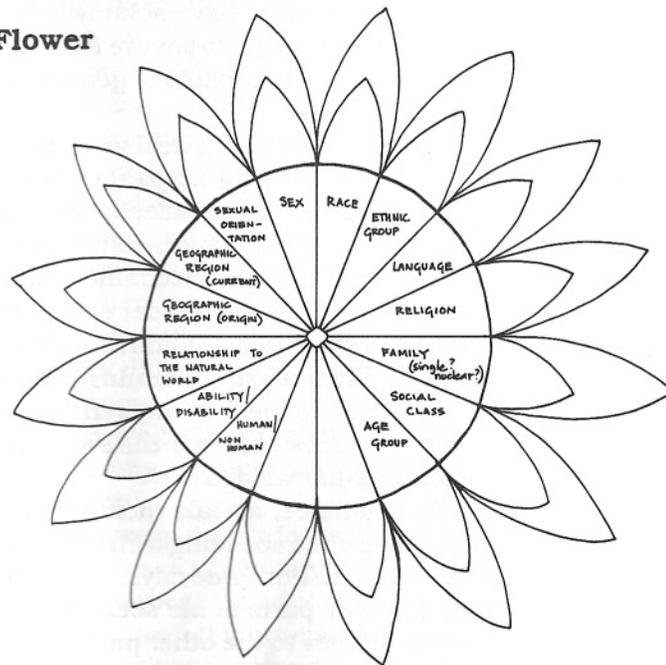
Each "petal" of the flower represents – or names – an aspect of social identity. The blank petal is there to encourage people to add an aspect we may have omitted because of limits in our perception. Each petal can be used to situate the educator with regard to colleagues and participants, in a way that helps to predict where differences and tensions may emerge.

Two gay organizers conduct a workshop with parents in a neighbourhood school; members of a Vietnamese community organization invite an English-speaking theatre director to address their monthly meeting; a retired miner speaks with a group of working-class high-school students ... the variations are almost endless. Our effort here is to develop self-awareness for strategic education.

* See chapter three, "DRAWING OUT KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE AND LOOKING FOR PATTERNS. The power flower: reflection on our social identities," for a detailed account of its use as a workshop activity. For a more comprehensive tool to analyse cultural influences on individuals, see Carl E. James, *Seeing Ourselves: Exploring Race, Ethnicity and Culture*, chapter I, particularly the diagram of concentric circles on p.16.

The politics of the gender petal

Let's take the gender petal, for instance. The gender makeup of a teaching team will influence, for better or worse, the kind of dynamics that are created in an educational activity, just because of the ways we have been socialized around leadership and gender.

A teaching team made up of a man and a woman will most likely find quite different dynamics than a team of two men or one with two women, particularly because of the power inequality between men and women in our society. But once the educators have acknowledged this inequality they can take steps in their program design to ensure that the woman's voice is built in equally from the start, and that bad habits of gender domination don't get reproduced throughout the process.

Once the educators deal with this issue, they have to consider their gender relations with the participants. Two women working together, if most of the group participants are male, have one challenge. Two men working together in a mixed-gender group have a different set of dynamics to consider. And so on.

Without making mechanical assumptions about behaviour based on gender, if we know the gender composition of the teaching team and the participant group we can make educated guesses beforehand about tensions that can arise. If, when we are planning events and workshops, we work through the power flower to identify differences and power inequalities that will affect the group dynamics, we enter the event equipped with that most valuable of assets: critical self-knowledge.

For instance, a male member of our team was once asked to co-teach a course in public speaking with a group of trade union women. The other teacher was a woman. For three days, in terms of gender, he was a minority of one, even though other parts of his social identity (race, union identification, language) formed bridges to the other participants. At a certain point in the discussion of gender politics it was clear that his gender had become an obstacle: it was preventing some of the less assertive women from voicing their feelings, partly because they didn't want him to be hurt by their anger. He had a choice to consider: to remain in the room and hence suppress the discussion, or to volunteer to leave for a couple of hours and return when his presence would no longer be a hindrance.

His behaviour was not at issue. This choice had nothing to do with his skill or his sympathy with women's rights. It was strictly a matter of his social identity and the power dynamics around it. Because of the pervasive violence against women, because patriarchal structures have silenced women, because of male-oriented pornography – the list could go on and on – there were intimate issues that union women simply couldn't broach with a man in the room. By consciously and explicitly choosing to leave in good humour, he ensured that the group could move ahead, and that he would be genuinely welcome back later to contribute in other areas of the course.

While it can be puzzling and anxiety-producing at times, this untangling of the personal from the structural can free educators as much as participants from dynamics that block learning.

The power of other petals

For each category of the power flower (age, gender, language, etc.) there is a dominant Canadian social identity.

We may be clear that in language the dominant identity is English and that in sexual orientation it is heterosexuality. But are we as clear about the implications of environmental thinking, the relations between humans and the natural environment? Are we in agreement about the dynamics among age groups or geographic regions? How often have we participated in meetings where differently abled people are fully integrated?

These identities have usually been built so deeply into our minds from an early age that we now take them for granted. We need to stop and probe our assumptions about them.

As educators we are continually surprised by the subtlety of these processes. Assumptions built in early in our lives have to be peeled away, layer by layer. Those of us engaged in educational work for social change need to probe the inequities that operate whenever a group of us gets together. We need to explore the diverse and pervasive ways in which inequities are reproduced and commit ourselves to overcoming them.

We must also be aware that this task is not always so straightforward. While class, race, and gender differences constantly emerge as central power dynamics, other petals of the power flower – religion or sexual orientation, for instance – are of decisive importance only on certain occasions. Deepening our consciousness about social identity requires taking time, probing our own discomfort, risking frank discussion.

No one is personally responsible for their social identity, but we are responsible for our actions. It doesn't help anyone if one of us feels guilty for being a Toronto-based, English-speaking educator in a workshop with Innu people in Labrador. On the other hand, it is crucial to be aware of the overriding privileges of central Canadian, English-speaking experience, and of how the group perceives such experience.

A failure to have this awareness will ensure failure in the workshop. An unwillingness to recognize – and learn about – the role of social identity will ensure the perpetuation of power relations and will hold back rather than advance the work of education for social change.

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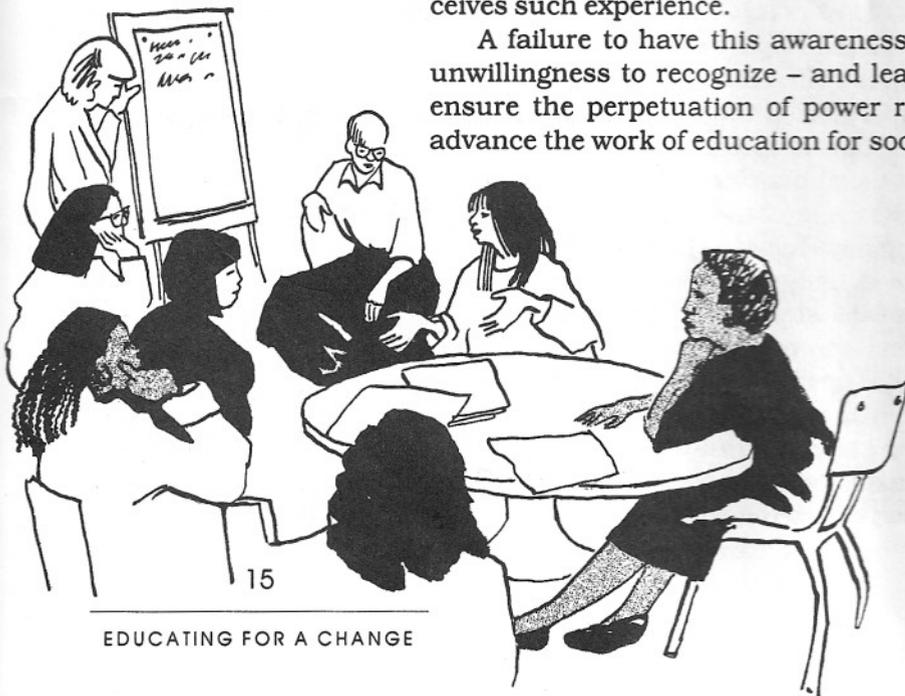
Organizational identity

The cultural approach

As educators, when we get involved with an organization, it's a package deal. With our affiliation comes entry into a subculture.

Think of how differently community service agencies, international solidarity committees, and trade unions operate day by day. Each of them has a code of how things are done, a collective memory with villains and heroes, a set of topics that make different people uncomfortable, an image of appropriate ways to celebrate and to mourn.

Those of us interested in political and ideological issues often underestimate the pervasive power of these cultures. As educators, we need access to the nooks and crannies of the organizational culture to work effectively with the organization.

There's a simple exercise that helps tune us in to this dimension of "organizational culture" in social action work. Look around the room at your meeting and ask yourself about each person you see who is attending on behalf of some organization. Do people from a particular organization have any distinctive ways of dressing or talking? Do they seem relaxed or rushed? Secure or nervous? Super-critical or ultra-diplomatic? Or is there anything else that sets them apart, or defines them?

Just by asking these questions you will begin to see the range of dynamics and practices embodied in our organizational identities.

Insiders and outsiders

In organizational cultures the most important dividing line is between insiders and outsiders. For instance, when we do education work within our own organizations we tend to have a certain dynamic. When an outsider comes in, the dynamic changes. As educators, when we work as outsiders the matter of who invites us in and how they present us to other members becomes of paramount importance.

Those of us who work as educational freelancers are constantly outsiders, a role that brings strengths as well as weaknesses in mixing with organizational cultures. When we're offered a job with an organization, we start by saying yes or no to the invitation. From the beginning, outsiders have to analyse organizational cultures as part of sorting out the potential and limits of the work.

For those of us who are insiders, employed within membership organizations like churches or unions, the issue of organizational culture has different implications. Often we have been members before moving into leadership roles and educational activity. Ours is the intimate knowledge of the "connected critic". Yet our insider status can make us unduly cautious. We might engage in a kind of self-censorship, toning down bold statements to the point where the organization might need to bring in an outsider for educational work.

When insiders and outsiders co-operate, they are crossing a line of organizational culture, whatever they may have in common in social identity and political stance. Both must be willing to share information and to continually negotiate the terms of alliance and the priorities.

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Organizational cultures are reflected in language. Let's consider the names applied to people who conduct education sessions, for example. In schools they are called teachers, in universities they are professors, and in training institutions they are instructors. In social service organizations they are facilitators and in trade unions they are discussion leaders. There are also consultants, animators, chairs, and educators – the list goes on.

Sensitivity to language is essential for educators who want to make common cause with learners. One slip in a session – applying a label alien to the culture of the group, for instance – can take an educator from being part of a discussion to being perceived as "outside" or "other". It can happen in a moment, and the speaker may be blissfully unaware of what has taken place.

The best insurance against such slips, of course, is not a tense, self-conscious choice of words but an effort to make sure that the lines of communication at an event are always open – and not just two ways but in all directions – and that the "speaker" does not control these lines to her or his own advantage.

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Cultural mapping

Through our work, one organizational culture we've started to map from within is the Canadian trade union movement.* Our portrayal of the "union culture" emphasizes certain unifying features:

◇ it is essentially voluntary
◇ it shares important information verbally, not on paper
◇ it takes an adversarial position towards the corporate sector and government leadership
◇ it is internally politicized
◇ it maintains a tension between providing service and mobilizing members.

These five features could be explored in great detail, and certainly we could add more to the list. But even this short list is enough to help us begin to identify points of difference between unions and, let us say, community colleges, churches, social movements, or political parties.

In comparing "union culture" with "environmental group culture" we can consider how environmental groups function differently. For example, environmental groups tend to be:

◇ less hierarchical in their decision-making
◇ looser in their lines of internal accountability
◇ more flexible in forming tactical alliances on an issue-by-issue basis
◇ more influenced by formal academic research
◇ narrower in focus when lobbying government.

The comparison may be sketchy, but it's an example of a first stage in cultural mapping. When educators immersed in the processes of a women's collective enter a social service agency, or when someone experienced in policy work with senior adults enters an immigrant community organization, they must pay special attention to culture, to "how things are done around here". Certainly, we should not be surprised when tensions arise among organizations in a coalition, or when approaches and language that work in one location fail utterly in another.

The organizations we work with gradually influence our ways of speaking and acting. In the words of one seasoned trade unionist, "If you fly with the ducks long enough, you'll start to quack." As each of us begins an educational project, then, we need to be sensitive to organizational identities, our own and others, if we hope to communicate clearly and effectively.

* See D'Arcy Martin, "With A Little Help From Our Friends," in *Our Times*, Vol.VI, No.3 (April 1987); see also the *Our Times* issue on "Labour Education Today," Vol.V, No.1 (February 1986).

Political identity

Once we're clear on social identity and organizational identity, it's worth our while to talk about the political values in our educational work.

There is an enormous literature on adult education, and it's easy to become lost in it all. So we have grouped educational research and practice into three general political approaches: conservative, liberal, and transformational. Education activists can learn something from all these currents.*

Conservative approaches

The hegemony of the conservative current is backed up with extensive budgets, publications, scientific research teams, and references that are articles of faith, like "freedom" and "progress". The content of conservative education is the worldview and experience of the elites, which all others are expected to appreciate, if not emulate; and the function is ultimately to maintain the legitimacy of the status quo.

Within this current there is a certain continuum from traditional to technocratic thinking. At the traditional pole, conservative education is so nostalgic as to seem absurd, like the Afrikaner curriculum in Black South Africa's schools or the European and American "classics" that are studied to the exclusion of local literatures in colonies and neocolonies all over the world.

The more dynamic, technocratic pole equips a leadership for its ruling role and assigns the majority to their slots, the narrow tasks needed to reproduce the system. Under the guise of "hard facts", technocratic educators convince adult learners that those in charge belong there by virtue of their expertise, and that learners' choices need to be "realistic" within the framework of the status quo.

When modern productive systems began to polarize "good jobs" and "bad jobs", conservative educators responded with new content. They now speak of the need to overcome "critical skill shortages" as central to maintaining competitiveness, and they channel adult education resources to the "essential" workers in the top strata of the labour force. The priority for education is managing human resources to keep the economy ticking, and only when there is a surplus of educational resources will it be possible to educate the majority beyond a basic literacy level. In this approach the capitalist economy is a given, outside the realm of educators to question or challenge.

For conservative educators the U.S. psychologist B.F. Skinner is one of the key writers. The approach guides much of the competency-based training work by which workers are taught in Western Europe and North America. Among its expressions are the behaviour-modification exercises done by medical and counselling practitioners and the use of neuro-linguistic programming for sales and administrative personnel.

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* For a balanced and comprehensive overview of the literature, see Stephen Brookfield, *Understanding and Facilitating Adult Learning.*

* See, for example, the highly successful training film, "The Hidden Advantage: Neuro-Linguistic Sales Programming," distributed in Canada by International Telefilm, Toronto.

The method of technocratic education is to trivialize or dismiss outright the life experience of learners. This requires labelling certain uses of language as correct, certain kinds of knowledge as valuable. When the social identity of the learners is different from the dominant group in race, class, gender, religion, or culture, they must be made to feel that their ideas are primitive and their aspirations "unrealistic". Then they will be fully open to the imposition of conservative education.

For all its negative impacts, one positive contribution of conservative education, largely at the technocratic pole, has been its insights into the non-verbal and unconscious dimensions of learning. This area has been exploited successfully by corporate and political advertisers, in particular. So far it has been addressed gingerly, if at all, by educators engaged in social justice work, because of the manipulative way that this research has been applied.

Liberal approaches

The second current, the liberal, draws on classical humanism, and among its more recent exponents are Malcolm Knowles in the United States and the late Roby Kidd in Canada. Within liberalism there is a continuum from personal to corporate thinking and practice. At the personal pole, liberals emphasize individualism, the self-directed learning of autonomous adults, with a measure of social reform. At the corporate pole are sophisticated organizational development ("O.D.") consultants and trainers, who work with major corporations and governments.
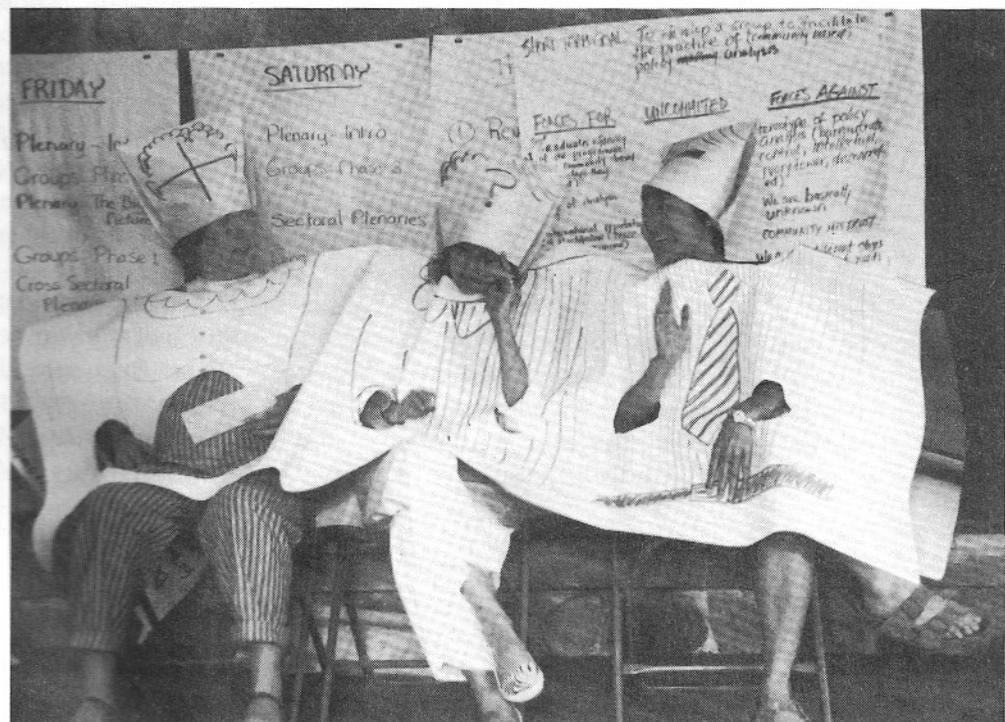
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In liberal approaches the focus is on attitudes rather than structures, on the individual rather than the collectivity, on personal growth rather than political transformation.

The content of liberal education aims at developing the skills, confidence, and knowledge of the self-directed individual. With their great attention to attitudes, good liberal educators highly value the life experience of individual learners. They bring individual biographies and personal values into the core of the learning process. In this approach, education is neutral, stressing the need to look at both sides – and, less often, at all sides – of an issue.

In its method, liberal education focuses most fruitfully on the processes of self-directed learning and small group dynamics. The approach does have operational principles that can be useful to anyone in adult education, such as:

❖ making sure that participants understand that learning is valuable
❖ seeing mistakes as integral to learning
❖ drawing on and valuing the experience of participants
❖ connecting new facts or insights with what people already know
❖ building in direct and frequent feedback to the educator
❖ developing sensitivity to non-verbal forms of communication
❖ encouraging participants to take responsibility for their own learning.

Drawing on the humanist tradition of the well-rounded individual, corporate liberalism especially aims to develop a credible and fluent team member, within the existing social arrangements.

Liberal adult educators will undertake to improve unjust situations but avoid tackling the root causes of injustice. They emphasize the importance of "life skills", which oppressed people are expected to take up to change their self-defeating behaviours.

With knowledge as an essentially individual possession, liberal educators assert that its use should be subject to the free choice of each learner. Thus they allocate educational resources according to talent rather than wealth, with remedial programs offered to those who would not otherwise qualify. Within the curriculum, differences of gender, race, and class are respected, but there is no attempt to tackle the associated power inequities. Implicit here is a kind of paternalism, whereby education helps individuals to "rise above" their subordinate position.

The strength of this approach is its insight into human potential and individual diversity, and its resistance to manipulative teaching practices. The shift of emphasis in adult education from "knowledge in search of students" to "adults in search of knowledge" has been accomplished in many cases by dedicated and articulate liberal educators. As a result, liberals rarely assume that what is learned is what has been taught, which is a pitfall that conservative educators frequently tumble into.

For social change activists, the limitation of liberal approaches is their avoidance of power relations. The position that "education is neutral" reflects a resolute naivety in facing the fact that individuals are socially situated in an unequal world. As a result, many social activists are suspicious of the "touchy-feely" tone of liberal literature and dismissive of its potential contribution to building healthy organizations that can change the system.

While it is valuable at certain times to "look at both sides" of an issue or topic, this should be a step towards deepened commitment, not – as it often is – an excuse for inaction or a calculated blindness to oppressive and exclusive power structures. The tendency to ignore the broader power dynamics of learning situations means that liberal education is conveniently open to manipulation by those in power.

Transformational approaches

Educators connected to movements for radical democratic transformation work to link the goals of revolutionary politics with democratic practice and to build a variety of approaches to learning.

In the range of theory and practice there is a continuum from most participatory to most top-down or "vanguardist". In this book you will find us leaning towards the participatory end of the continuum.

In transformational approaches, education is part of a movement for individual and collective liberation, which promotes learning for critical consciousness and collective action. Such education seeks to transform power relations in society, relations between teacher and learner, and relations among learners. In this sense it is radically democratic.

The content of transformational approaches is the situation of oppression and the possible strategies for social change. The method begins with the lived experience of the learners, with validating it and exploring, through dialogue, its humanizing as well as oppressive dimensions. The method then moves to collective discussion about action, to the possibilities of transforming the oppressive elements of experience. This dynamic of reflection/action, or "praxis", is central to transformational approaches.

The intellectual root of the approach we have adopted in our educational work is in socialist and Third World liberation struggles. The key theorists include Paulo Freire of Brazil, Antonio Gramsci of Italy, and Julius Nyerere of Tanzania.

People involved in transformational approaches to education around the world use a number of terms that intersect with the growing international usage of "popular education". In Latin America, educators frequently refer to "educación popular" and "conscientizaçao", whereas in Southern and Eastern Africa the terms "people's education" or "education for self-reliance" are in common usage. In Asia, activists speak of "education for mass mobilization" and engage in "participatory research". In Europe we often hear of "cultural animation" work, while in Canada and the United States the insights of transformational education have influenced critical pedagogy, development education, feminist pedagogy, community-based adult literacy, as well as anti-racist and trade union education.

At the top-down pole are found some of our allies in specific struggles who draw on the brilliance of political economy writing by people such as Ernest Mandel and Louis Althusser and deduce their educational strategies from this starting point. These top-down transformational educators emphasize content over process and assert that correct theory in the heads of an enlightened few can translate into effective social justice work. Their downfall has been inattention to hierarchies and inequities in their own ranks, the sense of ignorance instilled in new recruits, and the sterility of debates among their leading intellectuals.

When, in reaction to top-down practices, the participatory pole leans too far in the opposite direction, it can merge into liberalism. But even at their clearest, participatory approaches have mostly been applied in small-scale initiatives. It's becoming clear, though, that we now need a new wave of thought to extend transformational education to challenges on a broader scale and to the educational opportunities that arise when oppositional movements actually win a measure of political power.

Our goal here is not to assert the primacy of a particular political "line" within education. Rather, we are proposing that political identity is integral to the critical and self-critical reflection of activist educators.

Once we have established this basic critical self-knowledge – locating ourselves in the triangle of social, organizational, and political identities – we are ready to assess the educational situations that all of us face. We have painted ourselves into the picture.

Political Identity: a summary sketch

EDUCATIONAL APPROACHES	PARTICIPANTS	THE GOALS
1. CONSERVATIVE * range from traditional to technocratic	* priority goes to those considered "essential" to the workforce	* effective leadership, pliable citizenry
2. LIBERAL * range from corporate to personal	* self-directed individuals seeking growth	* learners well adjusted * "neutral" on power issues
3. TRANSFORMATIONAL * range from participatory to "top down" * collective reflection and action	* oppressed people and those allied to their interests	* change power relations * transform socio-economic systems

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ASSESSING THE
SITUATION

The purposes

Sometimes as educators we seem to be just plain wasting our time. Despite our deepest self-knowledge and our most skilful facilitation, we end up being in the wrong place at the wrong time – and it's usually because we didn't stop to consider the broader social context in the work.

If we aim to change power relations, we need to analyse those relations, to situate our work historically. That means careful social analysis.

Since our work aims at challenging existing power relations, our survival, not merely success, requires accurate and continual assessment of the social surroundings. At different times we may be building popular organizations, strengthening democratic impulses in liberal organizations, or stretching the margins of tolerance in conservative organizations. Each of these situations has different tactical imperatives. And, depending on the broader political and historical context, making choices and setting priorities will have a different flavour.

The key is power: we need to assess whose power moves things around us, and whose power we want to put our energy behind. At times, because we resist its current uses, we have to question our own ambivalence about power. In addition to ensuring the material basis for our own survival, we need to review what work and which participants will help produce the changes that we are committed to.

In these very practical, day-to-day ways, we need our own brand of social analysis. We know that this analysis doesn't have to be solitary and competitive, as it is so often in a career-oriented society. Nor does it have to be abstract and dry, like so much academic political economy. We can draw on the collective knowledge that groups have gained through struggles around a variety of issues. And we can share that knowledge, with less critique – in the sense that we want to move beyond critique to making proposals for alternatives – and more proposal, less overview and more strategy.

Our purpose in social analysis is to assess the momentum of the forces around us and thereby formulate our own priorities. In the words of Sun Zi, written in 500 B.C.:

> The inherent speed of rushing water uproots boulders. This is due to momentum. The unerring sweep of the diving falcon gets the prey. This is due to judgment. Momentum is like the pent-up force in the cross-bow, judgment is like the sudden release of the trigger. A skillful fighter is one whose momentum is invincible and whose judgment is accurate.*

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* Tang Zi-Chang, *Principles of Conflict*, recompilation and new English translation with annotation on Sun Zi's art of war (San Rafael, Cal.: T.C. Press, 1969), pp.36-37.

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We should expect opposition from those in power to the ideas we are promoting. Without adopting the militarism of Sun Zi, we should expect, in all serenity, to struggle. We cannot do that effectively without rigorous social analysis.

We also need to keep our purposes clear to sustain ourselves in educating for social change. This work requires nourishment, which social vision can help to provide. Part of social analysis, then, is creative. It means constantly refining and updating the ideas of economic justice, political democracy, or pro-feminist and anti-racist process, and extending these ideas both in our lives and in the society around us.

The content   The content of social analysis is possibilities, their shape and extent. We can develop technical skills as educators, in planning, design, and facilitation of learning events. But uncovering the power relations that are part of and surround an event requires a grasp of different content, in four main areas.*

✦ The first area of content concerns the **identities and interests** of the people we are working with. This draws directly on the three dimensions of identity: social, organizational, and political.

Consider, for example, an invitation to do a weekend workshop on social action with a church congregation in Sydney, Nova Scotia. Naming the social identities involved, using all the petals of the power flower, is the starting point for placing this opportunity in context and assigning it some priority.

For a start, we ask if the congregation includes working people and unemployed people, with a range of involvements in the social action traditions of Cape Breton. Secondly, we assess our own organizational identity, in particular the nature and strength of our alliances in that region. Then we examine our political identity as well as the political identity of the people issuing the invitation.

This type of process happens continually. With each new social action, with each educational event, we are challenged in new ways to look at who we are and what our underlying interests are, as well as at the social identity of the other participants in the action or event.

In deciding whether or not to accept such an invitation we need to recognize that, unless educators are to become a private club, we must reach out constantly to include people beyond our own social and organizational network. We need to broaden our sense of potential allies, groups, and people who share our interests and can enrich our vision.

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* In this section, and indeed in the balance of this chapter, we owe much to the work of the "Naming the Moment" group in Toronto. Deborah Barndt, a founding member of the Doris Marshall Institute, has co-ordinated this group since its beginning, and other members of the DMI team have worked in particular roles as the Moment process has unfolded. See in particular the manual for community groups, edited by Deborah Barndt, *Naming the Moment: Political Analysis for Action*. See also *The Moment*, published three times a year, each time highlighting a particular issue. The Summer 1990 issue (Vol.IV, No.1), for example, deals with the Canadian federal government's Goods and Services Tax.

Along the way we need to clarify who's with us both in the short term and the longer haul. In deciding who we're going to work with, subjective factors also come into play. Who do we enjoy? Who challenges us? We like to look for elements of warmth, surprise, and fun in our working relationships.

Most people we know do much the same. They attend events, accept invitations, volunteer for assignments because they like the people they'll be working with. This personal, subjective side of judgement is less systematic, somehow less "political" and hence less often discussed publicly. But all of us draw upon it as an element of common sense and nourishment in doing our work over the long term.

✦ The second area of content, **naming the issues,** requires focusing on "what matters" in the welter of concerns around us. Paulo Freire calls this "identifying the generative themes".

These themes or issues are the arenas of greatest struggle at a particular moment, the most critical social tensions. Not surprisingly, they offer the greatest potential for developing consciousness and building organization.

Using the Sydney example, we'd have to search for a preliminary sense of the social concerns in the church congregation. Is regional unemployment on their agenda? Are the militant union traditions of the area a source of pride or shame? Discussion of these matters needn't be narrowly bound by political economy. What is called for is a capacity to integrate emotional and intuitive knowledge into our inquiry. To use only the left side of the brain is to use only half our intelligence, individually and collectively.
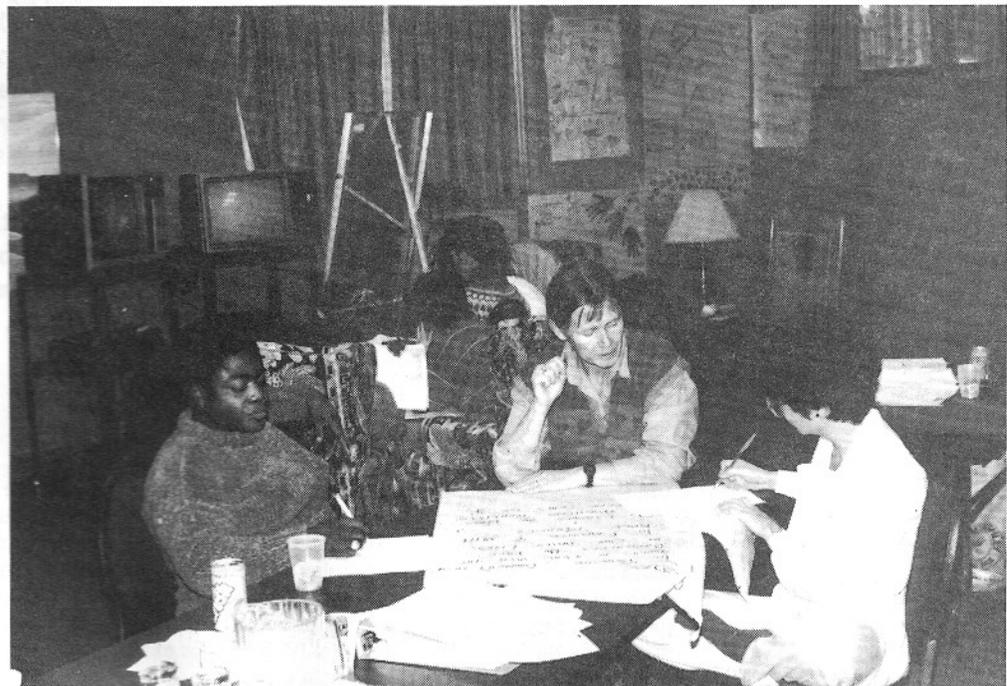
RICK ARNOLD

✦ The third area of content is **assessing the forces.** This requires a clear view of the dominant agendas, and an unsentimental synthesis of popular agendas. It is essential that we know the strengths and weaknesses of both sides – intellectually, organizationally, and politically – before we leap into discussion processes.

The question to raise about the Sydney workshop would concern the individual and collective leverage of congregation members – or their willingness – to address the generative themes. Without this leverage a workshop could still result in some new ground being broken, but it would more likely raise the level of disappointment and frustration in people who are not able to act on the issues raised.

This part of the analysis requires "street smarts", particularly in identifying weaknesses in the dominant structures – what radical educator and artist dian marino calls the "cracks in consent". It might be good, for instance, to suggest that the workshop include joint participation with other social action groups in the community, rather than be limited to the congregation.

✦ The fourth content area in social analysis is **planning for action.** If we've taken care to follow the first three steps, this one will logically follow. And weighing the possible courses of action will be the final test in deciding whether or not to accept an invitation for the workshop.

This often means applying the weapon of imagination to the task, trying to turn "hindrances" into "helps". What is the "free space" that this occasion offers, the opportunities for action created by the particular relationship of forces we can see in operation?

In the hypothetical case of the Sydney church congregation, we know – or find out – that there is no place in Canada with a more fully documented history of popular struggle than Cape Breton Island. We'd need further research and discussion to locate the current possibilities for action in the flow of past action.

Taking a broader perspective, we want to urge the integration of educational work within the context of social and political organizing. We see a link between the learning that can be harvested from organizing a rally and the research and organizing generated from an educational event. The connections between education and politics, then, are reciprocal, and they operate at both the conceptual and organizational levels.

By introducing these four steps in the content of social analysis, as a proposal for sorting out educational opportunities, we are, again, adapting material developed by the "Naming the Moment" group. We are also anticipating a sequence that will be explored in more depth when it comes to actually designing the educational event.

This kind of continual social and political analysis helps us make planning decisions, but it also becomes integral to educational design and facilitation. We can encourage the groups we work with to respond more strategically, in part by modelling such behaviour ourselves, not just by proposing it in workshops.

This, then, is our agenda for the content of social analysis. It is not a conventional set of research priorities. Nor do we consider that all four areas must be exhaustively covered before beginning educational work. But keeping these four sets of concerns in our minds as we work is essential to using our scarce financial and human resources for maximum social effect.

The method   All of us make time for solitary research, through reading for instance, but that's only a part of social analysis. We have also tried to develop methods of analysis consistent with the ways we educate. This involves engaging with others, creating analysis with others, celebrating discovery of ideas, acknowledging that struggle is a teacher. It's a lot more diverse and rich, we find, than your average reading list.

In particular, we want to emphasize the importance of broadening the in-crowd of sources for social analysis. When dealing with organizations, this means listening to the people at the bottom of the heap.

Try answering the phone in an office for a while. See how you feel when a caller asks "Is anyone there?"

Sometimes it's a shock how little traditional hierarchies have really changed, even in groups that attempt to play a role in radical social change. Clerical employees in unions, blue- collar workers in universities, food service employees at social change conferences: these people have a particular vantage point on the substance, and the hollowness, of social change practices. It's worth taking the time to listen to what they know, and not be limited to the insights of the "movers and shakers" in social change work.

Within organizations, the fact that one person's position is higher than another's doesn't necessarily mean that the "superior" person has more knowledge. Indeed, both from visceral identification with the underdog and from experience of what knowledge is needed to change things, we are probably safer to assume the opposite.

Ours is a politics of inclusion. In broadening out we need to keep in mind the discussion of identity. We seek to "keep difficult company", by which we mean including those whose social, organizational, and educational identities can be a persistent source of challenge.

When we're organizing an event, we might review the power flower petals with regard to our planning team and find out if there are social identities that we've excluded in the process.

Similarly with organizational identities, we can seek to include both insiders and outsiders and to make sure that our event has representation from a full range of skills and levels in the hierarchy.

As for political identities, the question here is to judge when the basic goals of the event are clear enough and broadly enough supported that inclusion of other political perspectives won't sabotage the process.

When we engage with people over a sustained period we need a more structured method for continuing social analysis. In our view, the most consistent and highly developed tool for this purpose is the "Naming the Moment" approach. The Toronto-based group of social change educators and activists that has developed the tool began in the tradition of "conjunctural analysis",

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particularly as developed in Latin America. Over a period of years they have developed a flexible, participatory, imaginative process, suited particularly to the needs and cultures of popular organizations in Canada. The group already has connected with the struggles of First Nations, neighbourhood organizations, coalitions, refugees, and trade unionists.

Within the Doris Marshall Institute (DMI) team we have identified four great strengths in the Moment method. First, the approach is comprehensive. The approach helps us to see what makes a situation an opportunity, providing the elements of timing and readiness that are so often lost in more detached social analysis approaches.

Second, the method is dynamic. It is not locked into an economism, for example, which would suppress the cultural dynamics in situations, or into a static emphasis on structures that begs the question of how change can happen.

Third, the method is inclusive. The experience and insight of those directly engaged in social action work carry the same weight as those who observe it. People of different social, organizational, and educational identities can all contribute to a total picture, which they then all "own".

DEBORAH BARNDT

Fourth, and last, it is fun. The process of linking insights, of sharing moments of "Ah-Hah!", generates energy rather than saps it, and it builds community rather than withdraws from it.* This is partly because the Toronto Moment group has developed expressive exercises of all sorts to engage intuitive and holistic thinking. Group members don't limit themselves to conventional linear or even dialectical logic.

While the Moment method is effective, it too is constantly evolving. Participants challenge its cultural and class biases and creatively adapt it to use with new groups of activists. We encourage readers to consult the Moment publications and to consider this discussion as a springboard for developing more rigorous and participatory social analysis in the course of educational work.

In the end the method we choose for social analysis is linked to our educational values. Similarly, we must align the objectives we set in education and the purposes of the social analysis we engage in as a part of the process. Planning assumes that we are positioned to act, to do the possible – and then to push out the limits.
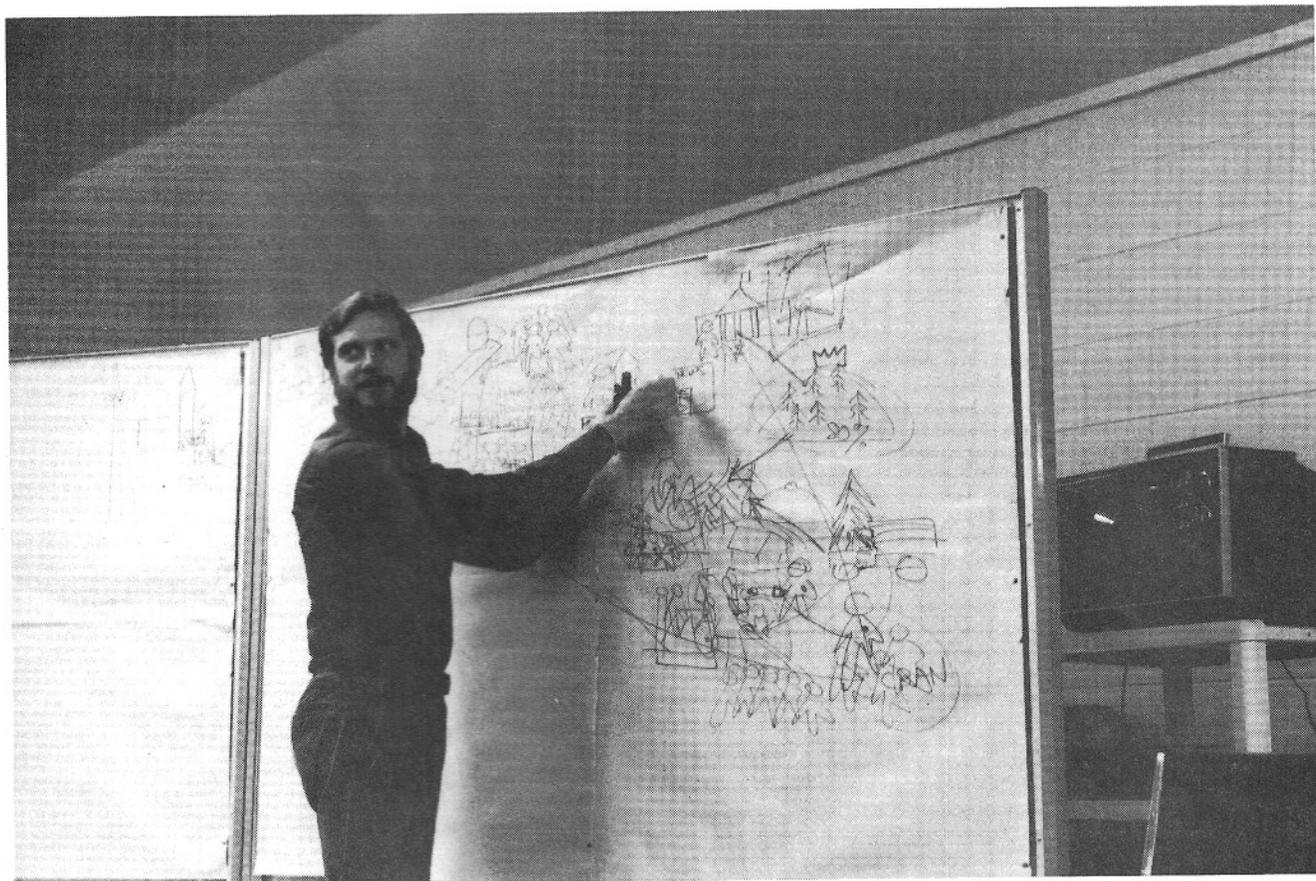
DEBORAH BARNDT

* GATT-Fly, *Ah-Hah! A New Approach to Popular Education.*